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ment, and began the study with much misgiving. The results [122]
were surprisingly satisfactory. [198]

After a few weeks I found that I had sufficient knowledge of Chinook to dispense with interpreters and deal directly with the older people, a tremendous advantage. Pride of ancestry [181]
is one of the strongest characteristics of the Bella Coola, and once convinced of my sincere interest in and respect for their history, they were willing to talk. They resent the condescension with which most white men regard them, so that contact with one who was friendly and sympathetic came as a pleasant surprise. There were, of course, difficulties. The canning season [464]
had begun and every able-bodied man was working away from the village. The conviction of each person that he was the best 124
source of information and that conferences with another were useless or unreliable, caused distrust. The desire of each informant to discuss only what interested him; the complexity of Bella Coola life and the necessity of checking every statement, and the constant difficulty of doing so on account of discrepancies in the myths of different families; the fear, almost groundless, of each individual that someone else had infringed on his rights by narrating some legend; and, not least, the need for tact, patience, and a sense of humour under all conditions, were some of the obstacles to be surmounted. Nor was Chinook entirely satisfactory. It has enough words for matters pertaining to fishing, hunting, and trading, but for the realms of mythology or theology it is inadequate. This difficulty could not have been overcome without the patient help of my informants. [illegible] parallel and synonym to explain obscure [illegible] younger man was called in for some ab[illegible]. Sometimes [illegible] often it gradually became clear from [illegible] Once the significance of a word was [illegible] I made a note of it and used it hence[illegible] vocabulary was thus built up, and conversa[illegible]. A useful [illegible] mixed Bella Coola and Chinook, [illegible] words were known by the person with [illegible]

1:McIlwraith E-5 (1922-1924) 1948
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124 whom I was working. Before I left, this medley contained so much Bella Coola that it was unintelligible to white people who knew Chinook alone.

Activities in the canneries would have interfered seriously with my work during the summer of 1922 if two men had not [115] been confined to the village, Captain Schooner owing to an injured wrist, and Jim Pollard by the illness of his wife. These two men were willing to work half a day apiece without jealousy. Each was intensely proud of the traditions of his people and, realizing that their culture was passing away, was glad to assist in making it permanent in writing. An intimacy sprang [23 577] up between Captain Schooner (see Plate 3) and myself culminating in my adoption, a circumstance which established and improved my position in the community. In this way I was enabled to collect a large amount of material before July when it was necessary for me to leave for the east.

In September, 1923, when I returned to Bella Coola, I found that Captain Schooner had died a few months before, respected alike by white men and Indians. With the aid of others with whom I had made contact it was possible to obtain much new information, as well as to clear up many obscure points. The previous summer I had been so overwhelmed with material that I had no time to collate it in the field and the gaps only became apparent after a year's study. The men were so busy hunting and laying in stocks of fire-wood, however, this was a trifle compared with the initial difficulties of my first trip. In October, when the Bella Coola began to prepare for 123 the winter dances, they had to appoint a successor to Captain 792 Schooner, who had played a leading part in their production. 887 Having been adopted by him, it was suggested that I take his place, a proposition which I readily accepted. This admitted me to the ranks of the old men, and I imagine that my interest encouraged them to hold more ceremonials than they had done for several years. In former times, a number of the older men used to devote much time and thought to the composing, re-

1:McIlwraith E-5 (1922-1924)1948
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kenzie, making his memorable overland trip to the Pacific, records coming upon Indian villages at every few miles of his course. Boas describes the way in which the inhabitants of each of these claim to be descended from one group of ancestors.

Though it is impossible to estimate the former population of the Bella Coola valley with any degree of accuracy, it must have been in the thousands. In 1921 there were surviving rather more than three hundred individuals, who live in one village on an Indian reserve near the north bank of the Bella Coola River, about a quarter of a mile from the sea. In the last century the tribe was stricken with smallpox, and since then consumption, venereal disease, measles, and other diseases of the white man have taken their deadly toll. Changed conditions of life and decay of the rich ceremonial around which centred their interests in the old days are also contributory factors in their decline. Within the last few years, however, the population has begun to increase.

Bella Coola Villages

The following list of Bella Coola villages was obtained in an effort to learn which had been deserted in recent years, the writer always asked whether or not a town was occupied at the time of Mackenzie's visit, an event of such great interest to the grandparents of the older people that the memory of it is still preserved. Villages said to have been occupied at that time are marked with an asterisk.

[illegible] which is about one mile in width (see Plate 3). The Bella Coola, flowing from the east, enters at the southern edge, and the *Nulqaitkwa* winds in from the north to the opposite angle of the head of the fiord. This stream, "The Nearest River" of the Bella Coola, so-called because of its proximity to the sea, is shown on maps as the Necleetsconey. Between the mouths of these two is the *Pa-ush*, a small stream rising

1:McDougall E-5 (1922-1924) 1948
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[831] [785] [913] [784] once was enough to kill an enemy, as if his spirit had been driven from his body by a sudden start. Even in recent times it is said that individuals who have observed ceremonial chastity have been able to perform miraculous feats. A few years ago a Bella Bella man lost two sons and was trying to get enough money to buy a tombstone for them. With this in view, he observed chastity for almost a year. Then he went seal hunting, and had killed a large number of the animals when, standing up in his boat, the seal blew against him so that he was thrown overboard. But he was so strong that he simply walked on the surface of the water and re-entered his [784] boat, none the worse for his mishap. The man who cited this instance stated that a number of Bella Bella had seen the occurrence and could vouch for it.

● [124] Ceremonial chastity is not a matter about which the Bella Coola are willing to talk. It concerns both their religious and family life, in neither of which are strangers welcome. But when an investigator becomes on friendly terms, and gains some understanding of the inner lives of the people, he begins to realize its importance. Ceremonial chastity is not only [785] potent in itself, but it is also the favourite means by which a man can cleanse himself of the impurities of human existence so that he finds favour with the supernatural.

1: McDowell E-3 (1922-1924) 1948
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extinct, are unusual; normally, the group is largely centred in one village, but with members scattered in other localities. There is no central organization. It is generally recognized that such a unit belongs in the village where its first ancestors settled, and the leading chief of that village is, therefore, an important person in the family, though without status of "head" of it. His advice may be appealed to in cases of disputes concerning names, but he lacks judicial authority. Theoretically, the descendants of the elder of two first people are considered as "elder brothers and elder sisters" of those descended from a younger brother or sister; but this is nothing more than an accepted fact; it plays no part in the social life of the community.

In addition to human names, the origin myths include those applied to dogs. The first ancestral group had dogs, and these animals had names, or were given them by their powerful masters. Ever since that time their descendants can apply these designations to their own dogs. It is unnecessary to validate such names, but no two canines can be given the same one at the same time, according to the rule which governs the bestowal of human names. This matter was not investigated in detail, and the only dog's name collected was one for which the origin myth is as follows:

> When *Tā'* in was first settled in the beginning of time, the houses were built in parallel rows, one above the other, up the side of a steep bank. At the very top was a white house, built over such a steep incline [illegible] their gaze to the dog the name, *Nā'tqaimūx ā'ānat*, "Rolling downward," which has since been preserved in the ancestral family of its descendants.

LAND

Great difficulty was experienced in obtaining information about land tenure. The Bella Coola resent keenly the way in which their land has been occupied by white settlers without, according to their standpoint, proper compensation. Com-

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tions on this subject always excited them, however effort was made to verify the following statements.

As with names, the easiest way to understand the rights of the ancestral family in land is by first considering the mythological explanation, which mirrors condition as they existed at the coming of white men. On reaching the earth the first people are believed to have prospected for suitable settlement sites, places where salmon and eulachon could be caught, and if possible, near side valleys where berries were abundant. Here they released the animals and plants which they had brought with them, on which they henceforth subsisted, in accordance with the supreme deity's instructions. The members of the group pre-empted these areas for themselves. Waste land, far from any village was, and still is, for to anyone. A few years after the first settlements had been made, according to the myths, the supreme god sent down to Smoquit a certain *Algoomlm* who allotted and marked the territory which was the property of each community, so that the a village consisted merely of a group of the four sections. No similar myth was recovered for either Bella Coola or Tal'o, although their concepts with regard to land are identical with those of the Kimsquit. This really gave a sacred sanction to the possession of land, an important matter to a people so religiously inclined as the Bella Coola.

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The system of land tenure follows the same somewhat obscure principles that govern the possession of names in an ancestral family. Hunting and collecting grounds appropriated by the four people, or by their immediate descendants, are the [illegible] ancestral family. The Bella Coola [illegible] ted, *saxymaxte*, which means "Food Supply."

It will thus be seen that a hunting area is [illegible] of any single individual, but belongs to a [illegible] st the property [illegible] most of whom live in a single town. The [illegible] up of persons, [224] who intends to give a potlatch usually gives [illegible] tives of a man [illegible] exclusive rights to the hunting-ground. As [illegible] s, temporarily. [481] h names, there

1:McIlwraith E-5 (1922-1924) 1948
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CHAPTER VI

ORIGIN MYTHS

Introductory—Bella Coola Origin Myths—Origin Myths of Other Tribes—Early Traditions Having the Ceremonial Significance of Origin Myths—Jesuit Origin Myths

Introductory

EXAMPLES will be given here of the origin myths, which are believed to authorize so much of the ritual already described, and to which repeated reference has been made. In 1898 Professor Boas published such an admirable collection of traditions of this type (pp. 30 ff.) that the present writer paid little attention to the subject. The Bella Coola, however, are so intensely proud of the deeds of their first forefathers that several insisted on recounting them before they were willing to do other work; in consequence, a fair number of myths was collected through necessity. Since tales of this type were recounted almost entirely at potlatches, their significance has declined since the prohibition of this rite. Consequently, many legends are only remembered in part; the abbreviated and often pointless series of anecdotes here recorded can be no more than a small part of the rich field which must once have existed among the Bella Coola.[1]

As Professor Boas has clearly shown, origin myths relate how, in the beginning of time, the supreme god sent down to earth the first ancestors of the Bella Coola people, each usually

[1] In writing up this field material, it was my original intention to place all legends together in a separate section, or appendix, following a common anthropological practice. This, however, would have been contrary to Bella Coola thought since origin myths, for example, are regarded as entirely different from other story stories, or from incidents connected with shamanism,—to name two other groups of what are usually described as "legends." I recognize that the insertion of this chapter of origin myths interrupts the sequence of presenting Bella Coola culture, but I believe that it is the way which the Bella Coola themselves would regard as logical, and that it brings out the essential interactions of this type of myth upon their whole life.

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CHAPTER I

WINTER CEREMONIAL DANCES

General Observations on the Kusiut Society — Powers and Functions of the Society — Initiation — The Ritual of Specific Dances — Various Origin Myths — Kusiut Prerogatives Other than Dances — The Death of a Kusiut — The Final Rite — Concluding Observations and History.

General Observations on the *Kusiut* Society

IN view of the importance of the *kusiut* society in the lives of the Bella Coola, it would seem logical to have described it in an earlier part of this monograph. Though an integral part of the complicated structure of social organization, it is a secret, semi-religious grouping which can best be treated separately. The word *kusiut* is connected etymologically, according to native belief, with *siut*, the term for a supernatural being. Thus the meaning of the society's designation is "The Supernatural," or "The Learned," for *siut* has both these significations. A member of the society is likewise called a *kusiut*, plural, *kukusiut*.

The investigator soon learns of the existence of the society. If he asks a man his name, and then inquires further what type of designation it is, the answer is always that it is his *kusiut* name, that is, the one by which he is known as a member of the society. Ancestral names are used only at potlatches or other ceremonial occasions, whereas an individual's *kukusiut* appellation is the one which he uses commonly. Moreover, for about three months of every year the Bella Coola live in an atmosphere of *kusiut* dances with a performance, or its preliminaries, taking place almost every night. Preparations for this ceremonial season, for so it may be termed, begin four days after the September moon is full, while the actual dances commence early in November and are continued until March. During this period the *kukusiut* are believed to be in intimate

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but a proud and energetic dancer sometimes repeats a ceremony three or four times.

THE SUN DANCE[a]

One of the forms in which *Alquntám* appears is that of the Sun, and in that case he is referred to as *Sawalaila*. Considering the importance of this deity, it is rather surprising that the *kwicut* dance of which he is patron is not more impressive. Efforts were made to obtain full details of the ceremonial from several informants, but only a number of incidents and a bare outline could be obtained. In part this was due to the fact that none of the informants[b] were themselves *protégés* of *Alquntám*, but this is not in itself sufficient to explain the comparative unimportance of the dance, since full accounts were obtained of other rituals from those who did not own them.

Nothing was learnt of the origin of any of the Sun dance prerogatives, except that ancestors of the owners obtained them from *Alquntám*. It is a common right, and *kukwicut* having *Alquntám* as patron are found in every village, among them being *Spaulám i* of *Tremut*, and *Nuxmalmalaix* of *Nuxpalt*. As far as could be ascertained, the ritual of various Sun dance performances is identical, so one account will suffice and the dancer can be termed X.

Like other *kwicut* dancers, X can perform at any time during the ceremonial season, subject to the approval of the marshals. The call comes to him in the normal manner, the uninitiated are expelled, and the *kukwicut* gather in his house to practise the songs which the singers have just composed. The theme is of *Alquntám*, describing his manifold functions, and particularly that of guiding the Sun. The following day a second song with similar theme is composed, and in the evening the cooks are allowed for the manufacture of masks. Four are required; a large one representing *Alquntám* himself, one of

[a] Needless to say, no connection or similarity is implied with the dance of the same name in other areas.

[b] Except one man who had forgotten all details since his conversion to Christianity many years before.

2:McIlwraith E-5 (1922-1924) 1948
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As they grow older the plainness of feature is more pronounced, accompanied by increasing heaviness of body (see Plate 16). Many of the adults are corpulent and move with slow, awkward gait. As a rule the men have great strength and are capable of prolonged and arduous exertion, particularly in paddling; in fact, constant use of canoes may have developed this powerful, ungainly build. Few are good walkers or packers; such, if they are found, usually belong to the lighter interior type. Among the grown people the face, though unbeautiful, often has a kindly expression, even becoming attractive in laughter or when a friendly grin spreads from ear to ear. With advancing age the prominent nose seems to grow larger, frequently becoming almost aquiline (see Plate 17). Many of the older people assert that this was even more common in former times. In time the face becomes lined with wrinkles and the body appears to shrink (see Plate 18). The teeth are in many cases worn down to the gums; this seems to cause no discomfort, though an old person cannot utter the glottal stops and velar sounds with which the language abounds without emitting a fine spray of saliva. They are absolutely unable to pronounce several of the Bella Coola words, while the constant spitting is a disagreeable feature of their conversation, particularly to an investigator striving, often vainly, to record sounds accurately. The deep wrinkles of old women give them a benign "grandmotherly" expression, which makes them more attractive in extreme age than in youth (see Plate 19). Senile decay is so frequent that the return to infancy in mind as well as in physical powers is regarded as normal.

Among the coastal tribes hair on the face is not uncommon, but in this characteristic the Bella Coola are pre-eminent. Nearly all the men have sparse moustaches, at least; many have a heavy growth, and several are full-bearded. That this was due to white mixture was assumed at first, but no evidence could be found to support this view. There are a number of half-breeds in the community but they are no more hirsute than the full-blooded Indians. Razors are now almost univer-

2; McIlwraith E-5 (1922-1924) 1948
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times, older relatives were revered, not only as senior members of the ancestral family, but as those most familiar with myths and other cherished possessions. With the spread of new ideas, the young people no longer respect the lore of their elders, and consequently do not heed their admonitions and advice. Theoretically, such self-reliance would seem desirable, but in practice it has led to unfortunate results. A young man, considering himself superior to the older people, glories in acting on his own initiative, but too often he lacks the requisite strength of character to guide his own life. If he wishes to drink, he does so; if he desires to marry, he chooses his mate without considering the transmission of ancestral rights which stabilized unions in former times; if he tires of his wife, he deserts her for another; if he cheats or steals, he is no longer restrained by relatives who fear disgrace. The elders, incapable of stemming the tide, watch sadly and ask seriously whether the coming of the white man has brought compensation for the loss it has caused. It is deplorable that the emancipation of the younger men and women has taken place before the development of the sense of individual responsibility and conscience which public opinion formerly rendered less necessary. Christianity provides a moral code for those who are fully converted, but for the many in the transition stage, the break-down of the old system of family influence has been tragic.

Profound religious beliefs and lack of individual initiative are shared by all Bella Coola with the exception, perhaps, of a few of the younger people who, having been educated at white man's schools, have adopted the new outlook unconditionally. In most characteristics they display as wide variability as any other people. In truthfulness, for example, they range from one extreme to the other. As the writer became familiar with the older men, he found it possible to recognize without difficulty the strength of some and the weakness of others. There are liars, but they can be easily detected owing to their lack of finesse. It is a pleasure to record the reliability of the author's friends and informants. Their veracity was checked repeat-

2: McIlwraith E-5 (1922-1924) 1948
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577 edly until complete confidence was established, simplifying
[124] work in the field to an enormous extent. Equal trust could be placed on these men in other respects; articles of value were repeatedly left in their houses with the absolute certainty that they would be guarded with care. Some few individuals there were, however, who were neither honest nor trustworthy.
[771] Bella Coola religion is not concerned with ethics, but public
626 opinion demands honour in dealing with relatives or friends.
577 In former times, for example, debts incurred by an individual were considered a liability by his relations. If a man died after
[424] buying goods on credit for a potlatch, his family were disgraced
[402] if they failed to pay his bills; now, unfortunately, nothing con-
[177] strains the younger people, many of whom try to avoid settling even their own debts, much less those of dead relatives. Individual conscience has not replaced the tribal and, more specifically, family influence. Dishonesty in small matters is not
[648] uncommon, particularly in dealing with white people who,
[177] according to the Bella Coola, were the first to transgress. The older people bitterly lament the lack of morality of the younger and state, probably with entire justification, that they would have been prevented by the open life which prevailed when several families shared a single house. On the whole, however, the average Bella Coola is probably no less honest than the average white man.

153 Individuals vary enormously in mental ability. In making
124 this investigation, it was necessary to interview all the older people of the tribe. Disregarding those unwilling to provide information, it was found that some absolutely lacked the ability to explain matters with which they were familiar; some did not have sufficient patience to be good teachers; some were so forgetful that they would omit necessary points in a story or account; some were downright stupid, whereas others displayed mental ability of no mean order. In reading ethnological literature, one is apt to think of the troubles experienced by the author, and to overlook the fact that natives have as

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grave difficulties in explaining their customs, as the white man has in understanding them. 153 124

The writer was impressed by the brilliance shown by several of the natives. Joshua Moody, for example, is essentially the philosopher. More individualistic than most of his tribesmen, he was one of the first to adopt Christianity and has been a faithful follower of the new creed. Deeply interested in religious questions, he has stored up what has been told him of the Bible and pondered deeply on all problems of life. Not particularly practical, subject to fits of anger or moroseness, but with a meditative temperament which delights in seeking biblical parallels and synonyms for Bella Coola practices, he is the kind of mind which, in other walks of life, would have produced the professor of philosophy. Jim Pollard is quite another type. Essentially practical, he has devoted his energies to keeping abreast of changing conditions. He is the best singer and composer in Bella Coola, the best canoeman for miles; he has learnt to handle a motor-boat engine, to aid prospectors for minerals, and has succeeded in amassing and saving a considerable amount of money. Jim excelled all other informants in clearness and logical presentation of his explanations, though he showed a slight tendency, intelligible enough, to gloss over aspects which he knew would be considered unpleasant. If Jim had been a white man, he would undoubtedly have made his mark in the world of business. The late Captain Schooner differed from either of the preceding. Older than they, and unconverted, he, perhaps, came nearest to the original, uncontaminated Bella Coola type. Heavy in build, coarse in humour and expression, he had a heart of gold and was a fine example of a native gentleman. He was glad to assist most patiently in recording ancient lore, being intensely proud of the traditions of his ancestors. A friendship developed from this which is one of the writer's happiest memories. Often in the evenings life in general was discussed, the war, the rush of progress in big cities, the quest for wealth, the spread of white civilization, and the problems raised by the contact of peoples. 115 177 [183] [123]

group. The moral code is not concerned with animals. The life of the Bella Coola would be unbearable to most white people, yet they find it far from unpleasant. They sigh at present conditions, but there is much to amuse them outwardly. If several people are talking together, one is sure to hear bursts of laughter every few minutes. It takes little to arouse them; a story they have heard a hundred times, the mannerism of a neighbour with his wife, the awkwardness of a white man, the stupidity of the investigator, any of these is enough to cause a hearty laugh. When collecting information, it was constantly necessary to joke with them, the most trifling criticism was enough, but they lost interest in the work unless kept smiling. Their sense of humour is not refined, most [illegible] about sexual matters are common and are enjoyed alike by men, women, and children. It is not that their minds are perverted, but rather that they have no reticence in discussing this topic, so they find it easy to see the ludicrous aspects of a subject which is ever near the surface in their minds. They have no limitation in poking fun at their friends; a successful practical joke, such as luring the writer's rifle-case, is enough to fill them with amusement. If the victim shows temporary resentment, the glee of his friends is complete, and shrieks of laughter usually terminate the row.

Unless the white man who comes to live among the Bella Coola is unusually broad-minded, he is at first repelled by the dirt and unfitness prevailing everywhere, even the people themselves seem unnatural. He finds it difficult to realize the sincerity of their religious beliefs, and the manner in which these influence their daily lives is hard to grasp. The potlatch system appears so grotesque that it seems to reflect a psychology diametrically opposed to his own. The lack of public opinion on personal conduct is almost incomprehensible. Gradually, however, he begins to understand the reasons underlying Bella Coola life. The potlatch becomes intelligible when regarded as a means of achieving fame; constant attention to supernatural beings is natural considering the firm conviction

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